

Captain Richard Roberts House
408 William Street
Monroe County
Key West
Florida

HABS NO. FLA-178

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. FL-178

CAPTAIN RICHARD ROBERTS HOUSE

Location: 408 William Street, Key West, Monroe County, Florida.

USGS Key West Quadrangle, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinator: 17.418990. 2716110.

Present Owner: Mr. and Mrs. Ames W. Williams
33 Fort Hunt Road
Alexandria, Virginia

Present Occupant: Dr. and Mrs. Richard Andreasen.

Present Use: Residence.

Significance: According to local tradition this building is one of two houses originally constructed in the Bahama Islands, then dismantled, shipped to Key West and rebuilt there after the hurricane of 1846. The building exemplified characteristics of the architecture of the Bahama Islands which are prevalent in many Key West buildings.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Not known but believed to have been constructed in the Bahama Islands sometime before 1847 and then reassembled in Key West in late 1847 or 1848.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Richard Roberts purchased the property from John Bartlum November 20, 1847 (Monroe County Deed Book D, p. 521). This property consisted of 45' on William Street and was 60' deep. It was part of the property John Bartlum purchased from his brother, Joseph Bartlum, April 20, 1847 (Deed Book D. p. 519).

The property remained in the Roberts family until 1964, when it was sold by the heirs to Ames W. Williams of Alexandria, Virginia (Monroe County Courthouse Records.)

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: No records have been located on this house. It is known that Richard Roberts was the captain of a wrecking vessel and John Bartlum was a ship's carpenter. Both families came from Abaco, Bahama Islands. It is assumed that when the families left the Bahamas they dismantled their homes and brought them by ship to Key West, where Bartlum rebuilt them.

5. Original plan and construction: A two-and-a-half story building with a gable roof. Two-story verandas are inset under the roof on both of the long sides which contain the main entrances.
6. Alterations and additions: Very few alterations have been made in this house, other than the addition of a bathroom on the first and second floors. There appears to be no major replacement of the original materials, only minor repairs of flooring and new brick piers to support the porches. A building housing a kitchen and dining room has been completely renovated and remodeled. A passage way recently covered by a roof connects this with the main house.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

A large proportion of the early settlers on Key West were Bahama Islanders and skilled carpenters, noted for their ship-building skill. Their influence on the architecture of Key West buildings is significant. The Roberts house, which has remained almost unaltered, and which is thought to have been originally constructed in the Bahama Islands, provides an important link in this architectural heritage.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: American Guide Series, Writer's Program of the Works Project Administration, State of Florida, A Guide to Key West, New York, Hastings House, 1949. p.61, drawings by Townsend Morgan; p. 841, description.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Monroe County Records and Deed Books, Office of the County Clerk, Key West, Florida.

Register of Wrecking Licenses, Key West, 1862, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C. Copy at Monroe County Public Library, Key West, Florida.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Browne, Jefferson B. Key West, The Old and New, The Record Press, St. Augustine, Florida, 1912, p.224.

Cappick, Marie, "The Key West Story," Coral Tribune, Key West, Florida, p. 4,11,20,57.

Harlee, William C., Kinfolks, Vol. II Searcy and Pfaff, Ltd., New Orleans, 1937, p. 1814, 1815, 1872.

Prepared by: Betty M. Bruce
Old Island Restoration
Foundation, Inc.
Project Historian
HABS Key West Project
September 1966
and July 1967

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The house exhibits many characteristics found in old wooden houses in the Bahama Islands such as: the use of random width boards, beading on the lower edge of the exterior siding, and low ceilings with exposed beams. Other notable architectural features include two-story verandas inset under the roof along the long dimensions of the house, exterior stairway, and mortise and tenon joinery.
2. Condition of fabric: Good with minor modifications to the original fabric.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: A two-and-a-half story house, 29'-1" x 30'-5".
2. Foundations: Brick, concrete and limestone piers, wood posts.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Horizontal wood siding on wood frame.

Gable ends and first floor porch facades: Horizontal lapped siding, beaded edge (1/2" bead), exposed surface varies from 5" to 18" with edges of siding relating to window trim, porch roof soffit, etc.; wide siding near grade, narrow siding at gable, but not in gradation. Porch facades, second floor: Horizontal flush siding 5 1/2" average. Beaded corner strip, 1" x 3". Siding painted off-white.

4. Structural System: Post and lintel; roof rafters 3" x 5" at 2'-4" average on center; floor joists where exposed are 2 1/2" x 5" at 4' average on center notched to accommodate variances; beams average 6" x 5", shimmed to fit.
5. Porches: Verandas extend along the long dimensions of the house at both floor levels, northwest end of second floor veranda enclosed as bathroom (modern); 6" square columns extend from first floor beams to soffit of second floor; ceiling beam pierced to receive hand rail molding at cornice; 4"-5" wood flooring strips slope to exterior; balustrade consists of half-round rail, 7/8" square balusters at 5" on center average; bottom rail shaped to shed water.

Steps to first floor of the veranda are wood and concrete of modern construction; stairway between first and second floors at southwest end of the first floor veranda has 13 risers, 7 1/4" and 12 treads 10 3/8"; terminal newel posts have chamfered edges and 1/2" round top; balustrade similar to porch balustrade; diagonal wood strips at outer railing. Fragments indicate balustrade removed at south entrance, balusters removed from southwest corner, first floor level.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Simple wood surrounds built of 1" x 2 3/8" beaded edge strips at jambs, simple drip strip at heads. Doors include four panel doors flush to exterior, heavy classic molded panels on interior; two in-swinging louvered two-panel shutters per doorway.
 - b. Windows: Six-over-six light double hung sash windows; two two-panel shutters per opening, originally hung at jambs, some shutters now fastened together and hung from window head to swing outward. Shutters are painted green.
7. Roof: Gable roof perpendicular to street elevation, terne plate roofing, standing seam; no overhand at gable ends; continuous pitch from edges of porches to ridge; sheet metal gutters. Scuttles on each side of roof provide light and ventilation for third floor spaces.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: Porches at both sides of long dimension, entry into center space from either porch; small space each side of central space. Space at west end divided by addition of modern bathroom. Exterior stairway at southwest end of porch to second floor, steps down to modern breezeway and kitchen-dining room replacing earlier structure (not included in this survey).
 - b. Second floor: Central stair hall accessible from south and north space each side; bathroom added at northwest end of north porch. Interior stairway to third floor.
 - c. Third floor: Two spaces at each side of stair hall, under-roof crawl and storage spaces.
2. Stairway: Second to third floor, 13 risers, 7 7/8"; treads, 8 3/4"; half-rounded rail, 1" square balusters, newel post chamfered at corners, rounded at top.
3. Flooring: Modern composition flooring over wood strips except at third floor where wood strips are exposed.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Horizontal wood boards on walls, varying widths to 18", hand planed, flush joints; molded chair rails; baseboards with upper edge beaded; simple wood cornice in central spaces both floors. Wood ceiling boards, flush joints. Walls and ceilings are painted offwhite and various tints.
5. Doorways and doors: Simple molded trim with beaded edge surround; four panel door, both sides, one per opening; one door of six panels.
6. Decorative features: Trim work is especially simple, based on variations of beaded edge boards.
7. Hardware: Miscellaneous thumb latches, porcelain door knobs and pivoted key hole covers and surrounds.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces northeast on William Street. It is immediately south of the Captain John Bartlum House, on the west side of William Street. A modern wood picket fence and concrete curb are between the house and sidewalk. Gates are at the east end of both porches.
2. Outbuildings: A modern kitchen-dining room and breezeway (not included in this survey) are at the west end of the house.

Prepared by: F. Blair Reeves AIA
Supervisory Architect
HABS Key West Project
July 1967

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared in 1967 during a summer project jointly sponsored by the Old Island Restoration Foundation, Inc. of Key West, and the Historic American Buildings Survey. Twenty-two structures were recorded, ranging from commercial structures, residences and hospitals to a convent, a lighthouse, and the Memorial to the Victims of the Disaster of the U.S. Battleship Maine.

The project was under the direction of F. Blair Reeves, AIA, Associate Professor, Department of Architecture, University of Florida. Measured drawings were prepared by student architects John D. Davenport and John F. Grimm of Texas A. and M. University, and John O. Crosby of the University of Florida. Mrs. Betty M. Bruce of the Old Island Restoration Foundation, Inc., and Professor Reeves were responsible for the historical and architectural data. They were assisted by members of the Foundation. J. Franks Brooks, Photographer, of Key West, supplied the photographs.